

FirstNet Board to consider draft RFP, 'public-safety-entity' notice during special meeting on Friday

Urgent Communications By Donny Jackson

April 21, 2015

[FirstNet](#) board members will conduct a special teleconference meeting on Friday, when they are expected to consider approving the FirstNet's much-anticipated draft request for proposal (RFP), according to a FirstNet official. In addition, the board will consider issuing a follow-up public notice to get more input about who should qualify as a "public-safety entity" that can get priority access to FirstNet's nationwide public-safety broadband network.

According to the notice of the meeting, which has not yet been published in the Federal Register but [is available online](#), FirstNet board members are scheduled to participate in the special teleconference meeting beginning at 10:00 a.m. Eastern time on Friday.

No agenda is included in the meeting notice, but the board will consider a special notice that would include the draft RFP documents, according to FirstNet spokesman Ryan Oremland.

FirstNet board members last month indicated they would reconvene via teleconference within a matter of weeks from its last meeting on March 25, when the [board declined to vote on the draft RFP](#). At that time, three of the four FirstNet board committees expressed support for the proposed draft RFP, but the finance committee opted not to recommend the draft RFP document.

During that meeting, multiple FirstNet board members said it was more important to get the draft RFP "right" than to release it before the end of March, which had been a goal for the organization.

"This is not a box to be checked—that the RFP document is produced, and it hits a date and you move on down the road," FirstNet board member Tim Bryan, chairman of the finance committee, said during the March meeting. "It is an absolutely critical and vital piece that underlies our business plan, which is everything to FirstNet and is everything for our public-safety constituency."

“I just want to continue to put it in the context that it needs to be put into, and I welcome the opportunity to work with the board and continue in the discussion.”

Exactly what aspects of the proposed RFP caused the finance committee to have reservations about making a recommendation have not been made public.

What has been made public is that the FirstNet business model will consist of three primary components: the \$7 billion in funding promised by Congress, service fees collected from public-safety entities that are treated as primary users, and revenue generated from secondary use of network capacity. The "public-safety entity" definition could have a direct impact on the potential user-fee revenue that FirstNet can generate.

Gathering input to determine the criteria for a “public-safety entity” that can receive prioritized access to the [FirstNet](#) system is the expected purpose of the follow-up public notice to be considered on Friday. Last year, FirstNet conducted a public-notice proceeding on the same topic, but it [received a wide variety of responses, even from public-safety organizations](#).

While there is consensus that EMS, fire and law-enforcement personnel meet the “public-safety entity” definition, there is considerable debate whether others—notably, government or other critical-infrastructure personnel—also should be eligible to receive priority access during certain circumstances.

During last year’s proceeding, the [Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials](#) (APCO) supported a narrow “public-safety entity” definition that limited priority access to the FirstNet system to the traditional public-safety groups of EMS, fire and law-enforcement personnel. In contrast, the National Public-Safety Telecommunications ([NPSTC](#)) expressed its support for a broader public-safety entity definition that could allow entities like utilities to get priority access to the FirstNet system.

Analysts and industry observers have stated that a very narrow “public-safety entity” definition

could limit the FirstNet user base to a point that it would be difficult to develop an economically sustainable business model and could hamper interoperable communications during an emergency—for instance, the ability for a utility to communicate with law enforcement during a power outage.

On the other hand, the same sources have noted that a very broad “public-safety entity” definition could result in too much contention for FirstNet bandwidth, which would defeat the purpose of creating a dedicated first-responder network. In addition, depending on the structure, a broad definition could result in FirstNet—a government-backed authority—essentially competing with private entities like commercial carriers for prime enterprise customers.

[Link to Article](#)

[Link to Urgent Communications News Articles](#)